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## READERS' LETTERS

### Portsmouth schools' high salaries, benefits mean less for students

In response to the June 15 letter written by Susan Lewis, I would like to clarify for her the reasonableness of expecting our School Department to develop and execute budgets that protect and strengthen programs for students at a cost that doesn't strike fear in the heart of the average homeowner.

The right to own a home or property is a very basic right. Overtaxation threatens that right. This is being done every day in other communities and surrounding states. The point of my letters questioning the judgement of moving the fifth grade

out of the middle school to make way for executive offices is the impact it has had on both teachers and most of all students, with no demonstration of fiscal savings and clearly a shortchanging of students.

At School Committee meetings and through letters to the editor I have attempted to reinforce the importance of programs for students, gifted and talented, music, arts, chorus and athletics, which always seem to be the first items targeted in the name of economy. At the same time, hiring continues, salaries go up and confidence in the School Department declines.

I'll quote from an editorial in another paper: "The main reason Portsmouth cannot make ends meet despite spending hikes that far outpace the cost of living index is its outlandish labor costs. The town provides gold-plated benefits for token contribution, enables employees to retire with generous pensions in their 50s. Soon Portsmouth and the state will realize that such largesse cannot be sustained." Those most affected, unfortunately, are Portsmouth students.

Kathy Melvin, Portsmouth